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ABSTRACT

The Netherlands' career guidance system and policies were evaluated. Data were collected through meetings with policymakers and guidance practitioners in the pubic and private sectors, analysis of data from a national questionnaire, and a review of pertinent documentation. The evaluation focused on the following areas: markets and the role of government; guidance within the education system; the system's "reintegration" structure; the wider role of the country's centers for work and income; stimulating the market; quality assurance; and strategic coordination and leadership. The following were among the Dutch career guidance system's identified potential strengths: the extent and quality of the labor market information and consumer information for use in guidance; the vocational education system's formal affirmation of the central importance of students' career paths; the emergent market in career guidance and information; and the network of centers for work and income. The system's potential weaknesses were said to include the limited attention attached to career guidance within the general education part of the education system and the lack of a true systems approach, accountability, monitoring, quality assurance, and clarity regarding government's role within a decentralized, "marketized" system. The following items are appended: a list of review team members; the review visit schedule; and a summary of suggestions and recommendations. (Contains 26 footnotes.) (MN)

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OECD REVIEW OF CAREER GUIDANCE POLICIES

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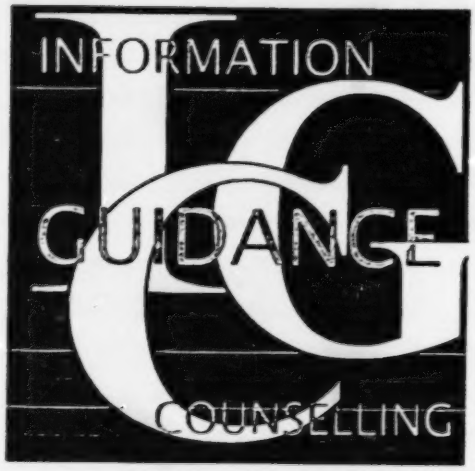

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COUNTRY NOTE

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1. INTRODUCTION

1. In the autumn of 2000 the OECD's Education Committee and its Employment, Labour and Social Affairs Committee endorsed a comparative review of career information, guidance and counselling policies. Participating countries complete a detailed national questionnaire, and after its completion host a short one-week visit by an expert review team. The Netherlands was the seventh country to host such a visit, from 15 to 19 April 2002.[1] The team had meetings with policy-makers in the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science, the Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment, and the Ministry of Economic Affairs; it also met representatives of a range of other key organisations, visited a Centre for Work and Income and a former regional guidance agency, and had discussions with researchers, trainers and guidance practitioners, in both public and private organisations.[2]

2. Drawing upon the visit, the draft national questionnaire response and other documentation, this report summarises the impressions of the review team, and its suggestions for ways in which policies for career information, guidance and counselling might be further developed in the Netherlands. After a brief contextual introduction, the report describes the key features of the main parts of the guidance[3] system. It then offers some comments on seven key topics:

- Markets and the role of government.
- Guidance within the education system.
- The 'reintegration' structure.
- The wider role of the Centres for Work and Income.
- Stimulating the market.
- Quality assurance.
- Strategic co-ordination and leadership.

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1. For members of the review team, see Appendix 1.
2. For the review visit programme, see Appendix 2.
3. Here and elsewhere the term 'guidance' is often used generically, as shorthand for 'career information, guidance and counselling services'.

2. THE CONTEXT

3. The Netherlands has a population of nearly 16 million. After several years of rapid economic expansion with relatively little inflationary pressure, the performance of the Dutch economy has deteriorated since early 2000. Despite this, the unemployment rate has fallen to around 2% – virtually the lowest rate among OECD countries. On the other hand, the Netherlands has a large number of 'inactives' – i.e. benefit recipients (including those with labour disabilities) who are not seeking a job. Vacancies are at an historically high level, and there are shortages in many sectors of the labour market. The proportion of workers who work part-time (32%) is much higher than in any other OECD country. Population ageing is expected to require increasing labour force participation both in general and among older workers in particular. There is a growing concern to introduce lifelong learning programmes in order to improve the quality of the labour force and minimise labour mismatches.[4]

4. Public expenditure on education as a proportion of GDP is lower in the Netherlands than the OECD average (4.6% v. 5.7%). The upper secondary graduation rate, however, is significantly higher (93.3% v. 78.9%).[5] The level of employee participation in training (ages 25-64) is substantially higher than for other EU countries with the exception of the Scandinavian countries and the UK.[6]

3. THE DUTCH GUIDANCE SYSTEM

5. Until the 1960s, career guidance for young people was provided mainly by state-financed guidance offices linked to the Catholic, Protestant and state-managed parts of the school system (see para.9 below). Guidance services then started to grow within the schools themselves. Many schools appointed careers teachers (*schooldekanen*) and began to develop their own programmes, supported by the guidance offices. In the early 1990s, the government merged the guidance offices with two other organisations – the contact centres for education and work (COAs) and the regional apprenticeship agencies (ROLs) – both of which were concerned with managing the relationships between educational institutions and employers within the vocational education system.

6. From 1993 the 16 regional guidance offices (AOBs) that emerged from this merger were expected to provide demand-based guidance services both to schools and to the employment services. Their direct government subsidy was gradually withdrawn. Instead, the public monies involved were channelled through the schools and the employment authorities. Since 2000 these organisations can choose if they wish to purchase services from the AOBs on a fee-for-service basis; they are also free to purchase services elsewhere or to retain the monies and provide the services themselves. At the same time, the AOBs have been encouraged to explore other potential markets for their services. The difficulties they have experienced in developing new markets and retaining their existing markets have meant that the

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4. OECD (2002), *OECD Economic Surveys: Netherlands*. Paris.

5. OECD (2001), *Education at a Glance*. Paris.

6. Eurostat 2001.

number of AOBs has now been reduced, through mergers, takeovers and bankruptcies, from 16 to 3, with the number of staff shrinking from around 1,800 in the mid-1980s to around 300.[7] Their walk-in centres, of which there were 54 at one time, have all now closed: they were not sufficiently accessible in terms of location and opening hours, and no way was found to fund them on a sustainable basis. Many of their services now focus on psychological testing services designed to meet institutional rather than individual needs: i.e. for screening and selection rather than guidance purposes.

7. Meanwhile, the public employment service previously run centrally as a government service had also been reorganised. Initially it was divided into 28 regional employment boards (RBAs), comprising representatives of employers' organisations, trade unions and regional government. Progressively, many of its services were contracted out to private-sector organisations, including – but extending considerably beyond – the AOBs. In 2002, a new Central Organisation for Work and Income was set up, with 131 Centres for Work and Income (CWIs) being established across the country to provide initial 'one-stop shops' for both job-information and benefit-claimant services. Those who are eligible for 'reintegration' services, which may include some career guidance, are then channelled via the municipalities or the Employers' Insurance Benefits Agency (UWV) to private-sector reintegration companies from whom these services are purchased.

8. The result of this process of decentralisation and marketisation is that the main guidance services are now offered (a) within the education system itself (with a great deal of institutional autonomy in deciding what the services should comprise), (b) by the new Centres for Work and Income (first-level information and advice), (c) by some employers and trade unions, and (d) by a range of private-sector organisations.

4. THE MAIN SECTORS

4.1 Schools

9. The Dutch school system is characterised by the parallel existence of public and private schools. Public schools are run either by the state or by the local authorities. Private schools may be run according to religious or non-religious principles. All private schools are eligible for support from state funds, provided that they comply with specified statutory requirements. Almost two-thirds of students attend a private school.

10. Full-time schooling is compulsory from age 5 to age 16; it is then obligatory to attend school at least part-time until age 18. Primary school runs for eight years, to age 12. Thereafter, in the past, students were divided into four different types of secondary education: pre-vocational education (VBO) (ages 12-16); junior general secondary education (MAVO) (ages 12-16); senior general secondary education (HAVO) (ages 12-17); and pre-university education (VWO) (ages 12-18). Now, VBO and MAVO have

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7. For a detailed account of the marketisation of the AOBs, see Meijers, F. (2001), The effects of the marketisation of career guidance services in the Netherlands, *International Journal for the Advancement of Counselling, 23*, 131-149.

been merged into pre-vocational secondary education (VMBO). Moreover, since 1993 all pupils in the lower years of secondary school (to age 14/15) have been taught the same core curriculum for 25 periods a week, if at different levels (leaving 7 periods for other options). Most schools now combine all the different types of secondary education (albeit often on different sites) so in principle making it easier to transfer between them. Nonetheless, students are still tracked from the age of 12, and although some schools maintain some element of genuine flexibility for a couple of years beyond that, the number of transfers is fairly limited. It is possible to gain entry to higher education via the vocational education route, but it usually takes two years longer.

11. The choices of sector are largely based on test results and school recommendations rather than on student choice. The role of guidance, therefore, tends to be confined to choices of subjects and tracks within each sector. These effectively start, in most schools, around the age of 14.

12. The Secondary Education Act states that 'one or more members of the staff shall be assigned the task of careers teacher/co-ordinator' (section 32). It is however up to the school to decide how this role is defined and how much time and resource is allocated to it. In practice, most if not all schools appoint one or more *schooldekanen*. Some of these have been on a two-year part-time course to train them for their role; some, though, have only been on a course lasting two or three days, or may have had no training at all. Most schools also have a system of *mentors* (class teachers), who may have a couple of class hours per week with the group of students for whom they are responsible. Within this system, a common model is for the *schooldekanen* to operate as a 'second-line' support for the 'first-line' *mentors*, providing materials and other resources to enable them to use some of this time for career education and guidance purposes. In addition, many schools have a school counsellor who offers students skilled help with personal problems, that may include career problems.

13. Since 1993, the subsidy funds that formerly went to the AOBs (see para.6) have been included in the lump-sum payments to schools. Some continue to buy services from the AOBs; some have switched to other private-sector organisations; some aim to provide all services internally. A number of schools have now appointed as *schooldekanen* staff who are trained career counsellors but are not teachers – partly perhaps because they tend to be cheaper, but partly also because of their distinctive professional expertise.

14. Within the curriculum, there have been attempts by policy-makers to encourage all teachers to include career education elements into their subject teaching. A requirement to do this was successively introduced into basic secondary education (ages 12-15) and into second-phase secondary education (ages 16-18), but in both cases has subsequently been withdrawn in order to reduce the load on teachers. The only sector where it remains is the VMBO (pre-vocational) sector, where 'orientation towards learning and working' is included in the upper forms of all general subjects and 'orientation towards the sector' in all vocational subjects. In addition, VMBO students are likely to spend between 10% and 20% of their first and second years on a 'practical sector orientation programme', and are likely to go out on work placements during their third and/or fourth years.

15. Within general education, by contrast, there is very little focus on the world of work. A few schools may run work-experience, work-visit or work-shadowing programmes for such students, but this is the exception rather than the rule (partly because there is little tradition of employer support for such programmes). 'Orientation on continued education' may be included in the so-called 'free space' periods, but – as its name suggests -- focuses more on educational choices than on their longer-term career implications.

4.2 Senior vocational education

16. After age 16, many young people either continue into senior vocational education (MBO) which takes place in 46 regional training centres (ROCs) and 13 specialist colleges, or enter apprenticeships with block or day release to college. This structure is also accessible to adults. It represents the outcome of a substantial process of merging small institutions, partly to make it possible to reduce student drop-outs by offering a wider and more flexible range of courses. Increasing attention is also being given to a more competency-based approach, with fewer fine-grained qualifications and with accreditation of prior learning; there is also discussion about introducing a system of credit accumulation and transfer, though this is still at an early stage.

17. Attention to career guidance seems at present to be growing in the MBO sector, related to utilising its enhanced flexibility. The recent report of the Boekhoud Committee on 'flow-through' within vocational education states that the career of the individual student must become central within the educational process.[8] For each of the years 2002-06 an additional annual budget is to be made available, of which it was suggested that 40% might be used to strengthen career education and guidance provision (though the details of this provision and how it is to be used are as yet unclear).

18. Currently, each ROC has a central student services centre where career information and guidance can be obtained, usually from two or three career specialists and/or other staff. In addition, within each track, tutors or apprenticeship officers are often available to provide some guidance to students on entry (to confirm their motivation for the track) and if they later wish to transfer between tracks. Portfolio systems are being introduced within some tracks to enable students to record the development of their competences. Institutions are obliged to report on their guidance provision in their quality-care reports.

19. Municipalities have responsibility for running compulsory programmes for new immigrants under the Newcomers Integration Act (WIN). These are currently (until the end of 2002) all provided for the municipalities by the ROCs. They comprise 600 hours, 50 of which are devoted to career orientation including a portfolio and action plan.

20. The qualification structure within the MBO system is divided into four levels. Up to the age of 23, municipalities are obliged to register all young people who have left the education system but have not achieved a 'start qualification', defined as level 2. Some municipalities employ youth workers and ex-teachers to make contact with such young people and encourage them to enter or return to the MBO system.

4.3 Higher education

21. Higher education in the Netherlands comprises 56 *hogescholen* (colleges of higher professional education), 5 agricultural *hogescholen*, 12 universities, an agricultural university, and the Open University which specialises in distance education. Most universities and some *hogescholen* employ one or more careers advisers, either in an integrated central student affairs service (which may also include psychologists, doctors, and student welfare officers) or in a separate career service.[9] In most cases, however, these career services are fairly limited. In addition, there are commonly study advisers within the

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8. Commissie Doorstroomagenda Beroepsonderwijs (2001), *Doorstroomagenda Beroepsonderwijs*. Zoetermeer, Ministry of Education, Culture and Science.

9. See Ramaker, I. (1998), *New Skills for New Futures: Higher Education Guidance and Counselling Services in the Netherlands*. Louvain-la-Neuve, FEDORA.

faculties. Some *hogescholen* contract with employment agencies to provide job-placement and related services.[10]

4.4 Employment and 'reintegration' services

22. The 131 new Centres for Work and Income (CWIs) (para.7) have been located to enable all residents in the Netherlands to reach one of them within a maximum of one hour's travel time. They are designed as walk-in centres for both employed and unemployed individuals (and also for employers). In marketing the centres, greater emphasis is being placed on the employed group than on the unemployed. The centres are based to some extent on the Australian Centrelink model, seeking to provide both a range of services and also a filtering mechanism for access to other services.[11] But whereas benefit claimant services are prominent in Centrelink's shop-front image, in the CWIs they are kept to the back end of the centres: 'the W comes before the I'. The operating principle is to maximise self-activation. A three-level service model is being developed: for those able to operate on a self-help basis; for those requiring limited assistance; and for those requiring intensive assistance. An electronic vacancy databank using a touchscreen approach includes not only directly notified vacancies but also other vacancies taken from press advertisements. Other career information resources are provided, include free web and telephone access, and staff are available to provide brief personal help where it is needed. Current staff come from a mix of employment and social-security backgrounds: the aim is to merge the two roles, mainly through in-house training provision.

23. Within this general service, an important role of the CWIs is to enable those eligible for social-security benefits to register for their payments and also to be screened in terms of their need for access to employment reintegration services. An intake interview is conducted – followed in some cases by a more detailed assessment interview – in which they are assigned to one of four categories in terms of the level of intervention that is required in order to reintegrate them into the labour market, and are helped to develop an action plan. In the case of those with disabilities, this process may include a medical assessment to evaluate the individual's capacity to work. The subsequent interventions available include assessment, guidance, training and job-seeking services, and may include customised services for individuals with physical, mental or social disabilities, for immigrants, and for the long-term unemployed. Career guidance is particularly likely to be purchased for those entering the labour market for the first time or after a long interval, and for those with disabilities which require a significant change of career path; it is often incorporated into a wider service package.

24. The purchase of these services on the market is carried out not by the CWIs but at a second level: by the Employers' Insurance Benefits Agency (UWV) in the case of those who are covered by social insurance based on their previous employment; and by the municipalities in the case of those on social assistance (mainly young people and new immigrants). They carry out annual tendering processes, in which contracts are awarded to a range of private reintegration agencies based on their proposals against a set of specifications, with price an important but not the sole criterion. The approaches operated by the municipalities in this respect, however, vary considerably.

25. The number of reintegration agencies at the third level of the system has grown substantially in the last couple of years and is now estimated at over 650 (though many of these are sub-contractors). It is anticipated that as the market settles down, this number will be significantly reduced. There are anxieties in some quarters that some large players may attempt to dominate the market by offering subsidised prices for

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10. Questionnaire response, section 7.6.

11. See OECD (2002), *OECD Review of Career Guidance Policies: Country Note on Australia*, para.40. Paris.

a period to drive out the competition, but it is assumed that anti-trust laws are an adequate safeguard against this happening. The measurement of the agencies' performance is based largely on outputs (including rates of placements into jobs and of retention of these jobs for 6 months) plus client satisfaction ratings.

26. Some experiments have taken place in permitting clients themselves to select their own service providers among the range of contracted reintegration agencies. In particular, this principle is now being applied in the case of former employees who have acquired disabilities that prevent them returning to their original employer (the services provided to such individuals are for one and sometimes two years paid for by the original employer rather than by the insurance funds, regardless of their culpability).

27. It is planned that as new custom-built premises are developed for the CWIs, the front offices of the second and third levels of the reintegration system – the UWV and municipalities, and the major reintegration agencies – will be co-located there. This process should be completed by 2006. In addition, there will be encouragement for other private agencies like temporary-job agencies to hire space within the same premises. The intention is that the various services will be arranged in such a way as to make them as coherent and accessible as possible from a customer perspective.

28. Alongside the CWIs, a new website has been developed (werk.nl), to be launched fully in August 2002. It includes diagnostic instruments (based on interests), data on occupations (including labour-market trends and salary data), information on education and training opportunities, and access to a web version of the database of job vacancies. There are also plans to develop a linked client support centre, to be accessible by telephone, e-mail, fax and post.

4.5 Employers, unions and the private sector

29. It has become increasingly common for employers to purchase outplacement services on the market for employees whom it wishes to make redundant. Sometimes these schemes are confined to professional or managerial employees; sometimes they are applied more broadly.

30. A few large employers have established mobility centres for their employees, often staffed by human resource development (HRD) staff supported by external consultants. These may include training needs assessments. They are concerned mainly with internal movement within the company, but may also enable employees to explore opportunities in the external labour market, depending on whether the company is prepared to support this or not.

31. Some sectors have developed sectoral training structures based on training levy (O&O) funds from employers and employees. Such structures are particularly important in the case of small and medium-sized organisations, which often lack the infrastructure to develop training policies of their own. The schemes may include access to some limited sector-specific guidance from training officers.

32. Many organisations also have policies of regular development reviews with managers or supervisors, with support from career advisers. Such practices have been encouraged by the government-subsidised Investors in People (IiP) programme, which provides a quality mark to companies that invest in the employability of their employees and use career advisers.[12]

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12. Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment (2001), *National Action Plan for Employment 2001*, p.9. The Hague.

33. A number of trade unions have recently begun to develop a wider interest in career guidance services. A few have started to develop rudimentary services for their members. Some, including the painters and library staff, have included 'career paragraphs' in their collective labour agreements. These may involve the use of O&O funds to purchase career guidance.

34. To service the demand for career guidance stimulated by these various programmes, as well as by demand from the publicly-funded reintegration services (see Section 4.4) and demand from individuals, a fairly substantial market has developed. It includes the surviving AOBs (see para.6), companies formed by staff from the AOBs or from the former public employment service, some sole traders from these and other backgrounds, and a range of other organisations including some large consultancy organisations. Some of these providers concentrate on offering career guidance services; others offer such services as part of a range of other training and HRD services.

4.6 Professional structures

35. Outside the basic training provided on an in-service basis for *schooldekanen* (see para.12), the main training provision in the guidance field is as part of four-year HRD courses[13] in five *hogescholen*: the notion is that all HRD staff should be trained in career guidance, though it is also possible to specialise in career guidance in the final year. There is in addition some training provision in the private sector which leads to state-recognised qualifications.

36. A number of organisations are involved in developing professional standards within the private sector. The Netherlands Association of Outplacement and Career Counselling Agencies (NOBOL) has 40 organisational members, with around 200 offices and around 1,000 consultants.[14] It is parallelled by the Netherlands Association of Career Advisers and Outplacement Consultants (NOLOC) whose 400 or so individual members include not only staff in these agencies but also sole traders and individuals working in guidance-related HRD roles within companies. Both organisations are linked to world bodies, and support a competence-based certification body (CMI) which is linked to the International Board for Career Management Certification (IBCMC). This body lays considerable emphasis on experience in the role (moving gradually towards the IBCMC standard of ten years of such experience) and so represents certification of mastery rather than a baseline qualification for practice (only around 80 consultants are CMI-certified at present).

37. Many guidance practitioners in the private sector, however, belong not to NOLOC but to other longer-established bodies, including the Association of Vocational Guidance Counsellors (VBA) and the Netherlands Institute of Psychologists (NIP), or to no body at all. The VBA has established a Careers Officers/Counsellors Register Foundation: members of NIP can qualify automatically for this register, but graduates from the four-year *hogescholen* courses (see above) do not. Some discussions have started between NOLOC and VBA about some form of merger, but these are still at an early stage. There are also other professional associations in the field, including the Netherlands Association of Student and Career Counsellors (NVS) for those working in schools and in adult and vocational education.

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13. The third year of these courses is spent in a work placement. It is also possible to take the courses on a part-time basis.

14. Questionnaire response, sections 6.2 and 7.7.

4.7 Career information

38. Alongside the progressive privatisation of the AOBs described in Section 3, a similar process took place in relation to career information. The education and employment ministries in 1992 transferred many of their respective information and materials-development activities to a privatised National Career Service Centre (LDC). Initially LDC was fully subsidised by the government, but these subsidies have gradually been reduced, being replaced by sales of products (particularly from schools and also from HRD departments within companies) and contracts for particular activities; from the end of 2002 the subsidies are to disappear altogether. The LDC's telephone/e-mail information service on study opportunities in the Netherlands is to be part of a European call for tenders after 2003.

39. The government has recently reassumed responsibility for some career information services through website development. Thus the Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment has developed the werk.nl website (see Section 4.4), some of the design of which was contracted out to the LDC. A particularly impressive feature of this work is a database of projected labour-market demand in some 2,500 occupations, linked to related education and training routes. Again, the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science is developing a website on educational opportunities. The ready availability of free information on these websites leaves LDC (along with other private-sector career information suppliers) to face the issue in the future of how its marketised products can continue to add value to such information.

5. KEY POLICY ISSUES

5.1 Markets and the role of government

40. The policies of decentralisation and marketisation have been applied more strongly to career guidance and information in the Netherlands than in most if not all other OECD countries. There is a widespread view outside government in the Netherlands that the role of the government in relation to such policies is now in urgent need of review. Its position is widely seen as representing not delegation but abdication. Many believe that instead of 'staying at arm's length' it should adopt a clearer and more proactive stance. This view was strongly expressed in a round-table conference convened to review the Dutch response to our questionnaire.[15] Trade unions were quoted in the response as stating that they 'consider career services extremely important, a task that should be regulated by the government'.[16] In one of our own meetings, a representative of the major employers' organisation commented that the government had responsibilities in this area which it was not currently carrying out.

41. The key issue here is: what are the appropriate and necessary roles of government within a decentralised and marketised system in order to make it work effectively? If career information and guidance is not only a private good but also a public good, with an important role to play in national

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15. Questionnaire response, section 3.1.

16. Questionnaire response, section 4.4.

strategies for enhancing lifelong learning and sustained employability, this is an important question. There would seem in principle to be three government roles in this context:

(a) Addressing significant areas of market failure.

(b) Regulating the market and assuring the quality of the services provided to the end-user, both to protect the public interest and to build consumer confidence.

(c) Where appropriate, stimulating the market in order to build its capacity.

42. In relation to these roles, it is important to acknowledge that the effect of government policies to date has been to place purchasing power in relation to guidance services in the hands not of the demand side but of the supply side: not of individuals but of institutions with their own agendas and priorities. The issue is whether such agendas and priorities are necessarily and invariably congruent with the interests of individuals and with the wider public good. As we shall see in Sections 5.2 and 5.3, this is open to question both in relation to educational institutions and in relation to employment integration strategies for adults.

5.2 Guidance within the education system

43. Within the educational system there are two potential problems with devolving decisions on career information and guidance provision to institutions. The first is that it leaves such provision at the mercy of management priorities. Some managers may see guidance as being very important for the institution and its students; some may not. The latter is particularly likely to be the case where, as in the Netherlands, external pressures on institutional priorities focus heavily on output measures based on examination performance, rather than on process measures or longer-term outcome measures. In this situation, the system tends to be viewed in management terms as a closed box, and guidance linked to individual progression outside this box as being of peripheral importance.

44. The second potential problem is closely related: it is the issue of impartiality. The funding of educational institutions is linked to enrolments and/or course completions, and this may incline them to restrict the guidance they offer. Thus an employers' representative suggested to us that educational institutions were more interested in filling their courses than with giving good advice to students on the realities of labour-market demand. Again, an external agency reported that a couple of schools had cancelled their contracts because it had advised some students that it might be in their best interests to leave the school and move elsewhere.

45. These issues are likely to become more acute if serious attention is given to the proposition that the career of the individual student should be central within the educational process (para.17). Though espoused so far only in relation to 'flow-through' within vocational education, it can cogently be argued that if it is a valid principle within vocational education, and if it applies in part to easing movement between vocational and general education, then it must be valid within general education too.

46. Evidence of the adequacy of current provision against this principle is limited but not totally reassuring. Ratings of students' satisfaction with the guidance they receive hovers around the mid-point on

a five-point scale.[17] One student in five entering vocational tracks within the ROCs do not know what kind of job they want to enter.[18] Levels of drop-out from the first year of ROCs vary from 25% to 55%.[19]

47. If the principle of the centrality of the student's career is to be adopted and applied across the educational system, then a number of propositions follow. The first is that more attention needs to be paid to strengthening links with the world of work within general education, both at school and at university level. At present some of the most able Dutch young people can go through the whole of their substantial initial education without any opportunities to explore the world of work (apart from the usually low-skill jobs they undertake in their own time for earning rather than learning purposes). Moreover, little attention may be paid to alerting them to the (often considerable) vocational implications of the educational choices they are making.

48. Second, we suggest that there is a need for a mechanism within the Ministry of Education – possibly a central unit – to co-ordinate policies relating to guidance across all sectors of the educational system. Guidance is relevant to every sector (including primary education, where the groundwork for career management competences can start to be developed[20]). Moreover, it is of its essence concerned with choices and transitions across as well as within sectors. To enclose primary governmental responsibility for it within a particular sector, as is the case at present, is therefore likely to be inappropriate and inadequate.

49. Third, we suggest that an important role for the new unit should be to investigate the extent and quality of the career education and guidance that is currently being offered within the school system. To date the few studies that have been undertaken have only covered a small number of schools. A stronger evidence base of quantitative as well as qualitative data is needed.

50. Fourth, clearer quality standards are needed against which inspections can take place. At present the inspections to which all state-funded educational institutions are subject are the main quality-assurance mechanism in this as in other areas. The inspectorate then publishes a brief overall assessment based on these inspections in its annual report. The attention given to career information and guidance in the inspections seems however to vary greatly. Much depends on whether there is anyone on the inspection team with an interest and/or some competence in the area. Where this is not the case, coverage seems often to be cursory. If the student's career is at the centre, this is insufficient.

51. Fifth, as part of such standards, attention is needed to the training in guidance competences provided to relevant staff. At present, schools are simply obliged to appoint one or more members of staff to be the career teacher/co-ordinator (para.12). If competent practice is expected, then it should be insisted that such staff should be appropriately trained – which is sometimes not the case at present. Moreover, if teachers are likely to be required to include some attention to career education and guidance in their role as *mentors* (which most if not all teachers are likely to undertake during their careers), then there is a good argument for including attention to this in initial teacher training.

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17. ODIN (2001), *De Nieuwe JOB-Norm*, table 20. Amsterdam.

18. Doets, C. & Westerhuis, A. (2001), *Voldoen aan Individuele Vraag, Toegankelijkheid, Positie Deelnemer*, p.147. Wateringen, JB&A.

19. Van Eijndhoven, E. & Vlug, F. (1998), *Het Zal Ons een Zorg Zijn: een Onderzoek naar de Kansen van Risicoleerlingen in de Regionale Opleidingen Centra in-Nederland*. Anrhem, Rijn Ijssel College.

20. A few primary schools in Rotterdam have started to plan for the introduction of a portfolio system, broadly similar in conception to those being introduced in some secondary schools and ROCs, in pursuit of this idea.

52. Finally, we suggest that the concept of consumer information – which is an impressive feature of the Dutch system – should be extended to cover destination and follow-up data. At present, for example, students entering higher education have access to systematic information on current students' ratings, by institution and subject, of their programme, their teachers, and the facilities provided for them.[21] It is however left to institutions themselves to decide whether to collect information on students' destinations and whether and how to make this information available. Consumers have as much right to information on outcomes as on processes. Such information would also encourage students to pay more attention to longer-term goals, as well as being useful for educational planning and accountability purposes. The same principle could then be applied to other parts of the educational system. The recent introduction of an 'education number' for each student makes the collection of such information much more feasible.

5.3 The 'reintegration' structure

53. In the reintegration structure, too, the power for purchasing guidance and other services has been placed in the hands not of the end-user but of the UWV and municipalities (see para.24). The structure is complex and cumbersome, and is at risk of becoming a good example of how marketisation can increase bureaucracy rather than reducing it.

54. There are basically three levels in the system: (1) the CWIs; (2) the UWV and municipalities; and (3) the reintegration agencies. There is a separation between the diagnosis of client need (which takes place at level 1) and the selection of the provider to meet this need (which takes place at level 2). Case management is based at level 2, but is largely a series of paper transactions because direct contact with clients is usually concentrated at levels 1 and 3. There is concern about the quality assurance of the services provided at level 3: managing this largely through output measures plus some limited client satisfaction ratings is unlikely to be adequate; the fact that the case managers at level 2 do not usually see clients limits the role that they can play in the process. Some of the work of the reintegration agencies is commonly contracted on to sub-contractors (or even sub-sub-contractors), so adding further levels to the process. These sub-contractors complain about the number of clients who fail to turn up for appointments, partly because of the complexity of the process and associated time-delays in receiving information on appointments.

55. One way of reducing the complexity of the structure might be to place the purchasing power in the hands of the end-user. This is in effect what happens in the Australian system: clients choose their service provider within a range of providers selected by the responsible agency.[22] Some moves in this direction have already been made in the Netherlands (para.26). We suggest that extending its application could help to remove some of the layers of bureaucracy and more generally to produce a more responsive system by changing the role of client to that of customer. It might also help to open up some future policy options for integrating the reintegration system into a structure of individual learning accounts (see para.66).

56. In addition, we suggest that steps need to be taken to introduce stronger quality-assurance mechanisms in relation to the work of the reintegration agencies. This issue will be addressed further in Section 5.6 below.

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21. See *KeuzeGids Hoger Onderwijs*, published by Uitgeverij Balans with the support of the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science.

22. OECD (2002), *op. cit.*, section 4.5.

5.4 The wider role of the Centres for Work and Income

57. The review team was impressed by the design of the Centre for Work and Income it visited: its prominent high-street location; its open-access approach; its customer orientation. The team was also impressed by the plans for co-locating a range of other services at these centres: not only the front offices of the other levels of the reintegration structure, but also other private organisations such as temporary-job agencies (para.27). This appears to represent a creative example of the incorporation of private partners in public strategies, with potential benefits on both sides. The plans for the CWIs contrast with the history of the walk-in centres run by the AOBs, which failed to receive sufficient levels of investment and have all now closed (para.6). The CWIs potentially represent a network of highly accessible career information centres across the country.

58. The team was also impressed by the design of the werk.nl website (para.28): its user-friendliness; the range of its coverage; and the breadth of its potential audience (school students as well as adults). Alongside the CWIs and the proposed customer support centre (para.28) it could provide a powerful three-part resource accessible to all Dutch citizens.

59. An important strategic issue is where this resource sits in relation to the national strategy for stimulating lifelong learning and sustained employability. It could potentially have a very important role to play in this strategy. There could however be some tensions between this and the CWIs' narrower role in the social-security system – both in the benefit-claimant process and in reducing public expenditure on benefits by getting unemployed people into work with maximum speed. For example, the reintegration system is very limited at present in the extent to which it can support individuals in learning that might enable them to gain access to jobs at higher skill levels. Also, the more that CWIs are associated in the eyes of the public with welfare recipients, the less likely they are to attract a broader clientele. In this latter respect, the design of the CWIs and the way in which they have been marketed to date (para.22) offer encouragement to their wider role. It is arguable that integrating responses to unemployment more strongly into lifelong learning strategies may have wider policy benefits, emphasising proactive and preventive rather than remedial approaches, avoiding stigma, and turning crises into opportunities.

60. If the CWIs are to be viewed as part of lifelong strategies, a number of implications follow. First, we suggest that the title of the centres might be altered to 'Centres for Learning, Work and Income'. This would have an immediate beneficial effect on the way in which their role is seen by the public at large.

61. Second, we suggest that the title of the werk.nl website should be similarly extended to include reference to learning, and that the design of the site should be reviewed to explore whether its learning elements should be strengthened. It might be helpful in this respect to explore potential links with the website on educational opportunities being developed by the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science (para.39), including the possibility of a common portal.

62. Third, the planning for the proposed customer support centre might include a review of the role of existing helplines, including that currently run by LDC (para.38). There could be merit in integrating or at least co-ordinating these facilities.

63. Fourth, the training provided for the staff of the CWIs and of the customer support centre should be co-ordinated, and should include making maximum use of the resources offered by the werk.nl website. It should also include knowing the limits of the service that is being offered.

64. Fifth, linked to this last point, greater clarity is needed about the extent of the career guidance services that are to be made available within the CWI. In terms both of time and of staff competence, it seems likely (though cf. para.68 below) to be restricted to information and brief advice rather than

extending to skilled assessment, counselling and coaching. In the case of those who are eligible for reintegration packages, it may be possible to include these latter services in such packages. It may be, however, that some customers who lack such eligibility would also benefit from these services. There is accordingly a strong case for staff knowing where to refer those who need more extensive and more skilled help. This is especially important if, as suggested in Section 5.1, an important role for government (and therefore for government-funded services) is to stimulate the market for guidance provision which it does not itself provide.

5.5 Stimulating the market

65. Although a fairly substantial market has grown up in the provision of career guidance services, the customer in most cases is not the client (the individual end-user) but the government or the employer – either directly or through intermediary bodies. No clear information is available about the number of individuals who pay direct for such services or about the levels of payment they make. It seems likely, however, that the scale of this part of the market is at present very limited. Thus, for example, figures reported by the former AOBs (see Section 3) for the proportion of their turnover generated from private customers fluctuated between 1% and 5%.[23] It was suggested to us that individual clients often choose to go to sole traders (including ex-AOB staff) because they have lower overheads and are therefore able to charge lower fees. It seems that the combination of being accustomed to free services within the education system, and of having continuing access to some free services, alongside the difficulties of commodifying guidance provision, all limit the levels of fees that individuals are prepared to pay. This is a policy issue, because many of the restrictions on the extent and client-centredness of guidance services stem from the countervailing interests of institutional customers (see Sections 4.5, 5.2 and 5.3).

66. The problem of stimulating individual investment in guidance parallels the problem of stimulating individual investment in learning. One way of addressing both issues could be through the concept of individual learning accounts (ILAs), in which individuals along with employers and/or the state are encouraged to invest. The government investment might be in the form of direct financial contributions, possibly directed at targeted groups, or in the form of tax concessions for individual and employer investments. There is currently considerable policy interest in this concept in the Netherlands, and a number of small experimental schemes have already been launched. The O&O funds (para.31) might be channelled through such accounts, as could the Labour Foundation's proposal for a personal development plan with accompanying budget for all employees. In the longer run, consideration might also be given to using the same mechanism for reintegration budgets (cf. para.55).

67. The key principles of ILAs are twofold: the principle of co-investment between two or all three of the parties with an interest in lifelong learning (the individual, the employer and the state); and the principle that the individual learner should decide on which forms of learning the funds in the account should be spent. Access to high-quality guidance could help to reconcile these two principles, assuring the other co-investor(s) that the individual's decisions in this respect will be well-informed and well-thought-through. An evaluation of one of the ILA pilots, in the plumbers branch, found not only that over 50% of the employees involved found it difficult to develop a personal development plan and wanted some

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23. Meijers, F. (2001), *op. cit.*, p.143. One of the surviving AOBs informed us that the figure in their case is now 10%.

external/professional assistance, but also that over 50% of the employers wanted them to have this assistance.[24]

68. There are two ways in which access to guidance could be included in the policy framework for ILAs. The first is by developing more professional guidance services to be available free of charge within, for example, the CWIs and public libraries. The second is by confining such free services, as at present, to information and brief advice, but to make it possible for those who wish to do so to spend some of their ILA funds on professional career guidance. Both options apply equally to accreditation of prior learning, and there is merit in considering these two activities together (particularly as reviewing prior learning can itself be a guidance process). The second option has already been suggested, in relation to both activities, by the social partners. There are some technical details to be addressed, in order to broaden the restrictive definition of 'training' in Dutch tax law ('learning activities that contribute to securing income').[25] These should however be soluble if there is a will to do so. There could also be resourcing implications: broadening the definition may lead to pressure to extend the fiscal measures.

5.6 Quality assurance

69. If individuals, employers and/or the state are to be encouraged to invest in professional guidance services, whether through ILAs or in other ways, mechanisms need to be in place to assure the quality of such guidance. This will then create the consumer confidence necessary to grow the market.

70. There are two aspects to such quality assurance. The first is to assure the competence of career guidance practitioners. As noted in Section 4.6, there are a range of professional bodies in the field, and at least two registers of accredited practitioners (CMI and the Register Foundation established by the VBA) neither of which view the main training courses in the field as being adequate. We suggest that all the professional associations should be invited to come together to develop a common competency framework for the field as a whole, within which the similarities and differences between the various roles in the field could be clarified, and standards established for each of these roles in terms both of entry standards (the right to practise) and mastery standards, with a clear status for the available training provision.

71. The second aspect of quality assurance is to assure the standards of service provision. This is an issue in all sectors, and again there could be merit in addressing it on a cross-sectoral basis. We suggest how this might be tackled in Section 5.7.

72. In addition, there is a need to develop a stronger evidence base for the field: this is especially important where a public interest is addressed through a decentralised and market-driven system. We have already suggested the need for stronger quantitative as well as qualitative data on the extent and quality of career education and guidance within the school system (para.49). Similarly, if – as we have argued – the private-sector provision is a matter of public concern, there is an urgent need to get a clearer picture of the

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24. Batouwe Opleidingen (2001), *Rapportage Implementatie 'Vrijhavenconcept' Installatietechniekbranche*, p.17. Velp.

25. Oomens, P. (2002), Drawing rights through individual learning accounts in the Netherlands. Paper prepared for conference on 'Finanzierung von Weiterbildung und Lebenslangem Lernen', Germany, 9 April. Oomens argues against such broadening for employees who already have initial vocational qualifications, on two grounds: that there are no indications of under-investment in careers guidance for such groups; and that quality assurance of such guidance is problematic. The first of these is open to question in the light of the response to the OECD questionnaire; the second is addressed in Section 5.6 of this report.

range of organisations in this sector, the nature of the services they offer, and the scale of the services they deliver. In addition, there is a need for market research into individuals' perceptions of their guidance needs and where and how far these are currently met. Finally, there is a need for outcome studies of the effectiveness of different kinds of guidance intervention, linked to the development of new tools and methods.

73. To stimulate these and other studies, we suggest that a research programme and a university chair be established in career guidance. The chair would help to provide status and intellectual leadership for the field.

5.7 Strategic co-ordination and leadership

74. In addition to intellectual leadership, there is a need for stronger policy leadership in the guidance field in the Netherlands. The central unit we have proposed within the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science would have an important role to play here. This ministry has however indicated its recognition that notions of learning continuing beyond initial education mean that responsibility for national policy on career guidance will shift to some extent towards the Ministry of Economic Affairs and the Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment.[26] We suggest that the Ministry of Economic Affairs might have a useful catalytic role to play, partly because of its leadership role in relation to employability, partly because it has fewer operational responsibilities than the other two ministries, and partly because it is used to working through and with other partners (including the social partners). We suggest that all three ministries need to be actively involved, and that a collaborative mechanism needs to be developed to co-ordinate their efforts. It should be closely linked to the collaborative structures that have been developed within the Netherlands to co-ordinate policies in relation to lifelong learning. Such a mechanism could also help to facilitate the effective participation of the Netherlands in the European Guidance Forum being established by the European Commission.

75. Beyond this, there is also a need for a collaborative structure to bring together the key partners in the field: not only the relevant ministries but also the social partners, the other key stakeholders, and the representatives of the professional guidance practitioners. In the early 1990s a useful co-ordinating role was played by the Council on Career Guidance and Information (RSBK), but it was composed of individuals with no representative status and was purely advisory in nature. The round-table meeting convened to review the response to our OECD questionnaire was felt by several participants to have been valuable in its own right, and worth repeating. We suggest that a further meeting of this kind be held to consider the suggestions in this country note, and in particular to explore the possibility of setting up a new body to be responsible for:

(a) Carrying out a more detailed *arbeidsradar* (labour scan) for the field as a whole.

(b) Reviewing the range and adequacy of existing quality standards in each sector, and then – in collaboration with relevant sectoral bodies – developing harmonised quality standards across the field.

(c) Exploring other ways of providing co-ordination and leadership in the field, while respecting and working with its decentralised and marketised nature.

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26. Questionnaire response, section 2.2.

6. CONCLUSIONS

76. The potential *strengths* of the Dutch guidance system include:

(a) The extent and quality both of labour market information and of consumer information, for use in guidance.

(b) The formal affirmation within the vocational education system of the central importance of the student's career path.

(c) The emergent market in career guidance and information services created by the policy of decentralisation and marketisation: still limited and fragile, but with potential for development.

(d) The network of Centres for Work and Income, alongside the werk.nl website and the proposed customer support centre.

77. The potential *weaknesses* include:

(a) The limited attention attached to career guidance, and particularly to contacts with the labour market, within the general education part of the education system.

(b) More generally, the fragmented nature of the guidance system as a whole: arguably, it is not currently a system at all, in any meaningful sense, but a series of disconnected entities.

(c) The lack of accountability, monitoring and quality assurance: this is particularly evident in relation to schools, but is an issue in all sectors.

(d) The lack of clarity regarding the role of government within a decentralised and marketised system.

78. The aim of our various suggestions has been to reinforce these potential strengths and address these potential weaknesses.

APPENDIX 1: OECD REVIEW TEAM

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APPENDIX 2: REVIEW VISIT PROGRAMME

Monday 15 April

10.00 Meeting with National Co-ordinator and project consultant

11.00 Meeting with key officials in the Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment, The Hague

13.30 Meeting with key officials in the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science, Zoetermeer

Tuesday 16 April

10.00 Meeting in Utrecht with Director of the National Career Service Centre (LDC)

12.00 Meeting in Utrecht with three researchers

14.00 Meeting in Utrecht with representative of the major employers' organisation (VNO-NCW)

Wednesday 17 April

09.00 Meeting in Amsterdam with representatives of the Central Organisation for Work and Income

12.00 Visit to a Centre for Work and Income, Amsterdam

14.00 Meeting in Amsterdam with representative of the Employers' Insurance Benefits Agency (UWV)

15.30 Meeting in Amsterdam with representative of a reintegration company

Thursday 18 April

09.00 Meeting in Utrecht with five trainers of career guidance practitioners

11.00 Meeting in Utrecht with four *schooldekanen*

15.00 Visit to regional guidance office (AOB) in Amsterdam, including meeting with representatives of this and another AOB

Friday 19 April

09.00 Meeting in The Hague with representatives of the Netherlands Association of Outplacement and Career Counselling Agencies (NOBOL) and of the Career Management Institute Netherlands (CMI)

11.00 Meeting with key officials from the Ministry of Economic Affairs, The Hague

14.30 Feedback session to representatives of the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science, the Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment, and the European Commission

APPENDIX 3: SUMMARY OF SUGGESTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Suggestion/recommendation	See para(s).
More attention needs to be paid to strengthening links with the world of work within general education, both at school and at university level	47
A mechanism should be established within the Ministry of Education – possibly a central unit – to co-ordinate policies relating to guidance across all sectors of the educational system	48
An important role for the new unit should be to investigate the extent and quality of the career education and guidance that is currently being offered within the school system	49
Clearer quality standards are needed within the educational system against which inspections of provision can take place	50
The obligation on schools to appoint one or more members of staff to be the careers teacher/co-ordinator should be extended to insist that such staff should be appropriately trained for this role	51
Attention to the *mentor* role in relation to career education and guidance should be included in initial teacher training	51
The consumer information provided to intending students in post-compulsory education courses should be extended to include systematic information on the destinations – and, if possible, subsequent progression – of former students from such courses	52
Within the reintegration system, clients should be enabled to choose their service provider within a range of approved providers	55
Steps should be taken to introduce stronger quality-assurance mechanisms in relation to the work of the reintegration agencies	56
The title of the Centres for Work and Income (CWIs) should be altered to 'Centres for Learning, Work and Income'	60
The title of the werk.nl website should be extended to include reference to learning, and the design of the site should be reviewed to explore whether its learning elements should be strengthened	61
The planning for the proposed customer support centre linked to the werk.nl website should include a review of the possibility of integrating or at least co-ordinated it with existing helplines, including that currently run by the National Career Service Centre (LDC)	62
The training provided for the staff of the CWIs and of the customer support centre should be co-ordinated, and should include making maximum use of the resources	63

offered by the werk.nl website, plus knowing the limits of the service that is being offered	
Greater clarity is needed about the extent of the career guidance services that are to be made available within the CWIs; if it is limited to information and brief advice, staff need to know where to refer those who need more extensive and more skilled help	64
Access to guidance needs to be included in the policy framework for individual learning accounts (ILAs), either by developing more professional guidance services to be available free of charge within, for example, the CWIs and public libraries, or by confining such free services to information and brief advice but making it possible for those who wish to do so to spend some of their ILAS funds on professional career guidance	68
The relevant professional associations in the field should be invited to come together to develop a common competency framework for the field as a whole, within which the similarities and differences between the various roles in the field could be clarified, and standards established for each of these roles in terms both of entry standards (the right to practise) and mastery standards, with a clear status for the available training provision	70
A research programme should be established to develop a stronger evidence base for the field, including a map of current private-sector guidance provision, market research into individuals' perceptions of their guidance needs and where and how far these are currently met, and outcome studies of the effectiveness of different kinds of guidance intervention, linked to the development of new tools and methods	72-73
A university chair in career guidance should be established	73
A collaborative mechanism needs to be established between the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science, the Ministry of Economic Affairs, and the Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment, to co-ordinate their efforts in developing the field of career information and guidance within the Netherlands; this should be closely linked to the collaborative structures that have been developed to co-ordinate policies in relation to lifelong learning	74
The round-table meeting convened to review the response to our OECD questionnaire should be reconvened to comment upon the suggestions in this country note, and in particular to explore the possibility of setting up a new body to be responsible for carrying out a more detailed *arbeidsradar* (labour scan) of the field as a whole, developing harmonised quality standards across the field, and exploring other ways of providing co-ordination and leadership within a centralised and marketised system	75

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